



Directorate of
Intelligence

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Moscow's Tilt Toward Baghdad: The USSR and the War Between Iran and Iraq

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An Intelligence Assessment

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[redacted] The Soviets have already improved their relations with Baghdad and may believe that their arms sales will increase Iraqi dependence on the USSR and eventually translate into Soviet leverage [redacted]

If the War Ends. Although the Soviets consistently have called for an end to the war, they probably would view its cessation as a mixed blessing. [redacted]

The Soviets probably would welcome an end to a major and unpredictable war on their border that could redound to the United States' benefit. A peaceful settlement would:

- Reduce the significance of one of the prime irritants in Soviet-Iranian relations—Moscow's weapons sales to Baghdad.
- Probably make the Persian Gulf states less nervous about Iranian expansionism, which would decrease their need and willingness to cooperate militarily with the United States.
- Result in probably greater contributions from Iran and Iraq to the struggle against Israel, thereby strengthening the pro-Soviet radical Arab states.
- Possibly improve the prospects for a rapprochement between Baghdad and Damascus. [redacted]

An end to the war, however, would also carry potential liabilities for the Kremlin:

- Iraq, without as acute a need for weaponry, might accelerate its diversification of weapons suppliers and become less dependent on Moscow. Saddam might then have a freer hand to resume his effort to distance Iraq from the USSR.
- Iraq would probably improve its relations with the United States. Saddam, for example, has stated publicly that full diplomatic relations will be re-established as soon as the war ends.
- Although a dramatic improvement in Iranian ties with Washington is a remote possibility, Moscow might worry that the absence of the unifying factor of the war could weaken the present fundamentalist regime. Moscow may be concerned that in these circumstances more pragmatic clerics, who are not as averse to dealing with the United States, would gain the upper hand.

- Iran might have a freer hand to increase its aid to Afghan insurgents. [redacted]

The Soviets think it unlikely that peace negotiations will begin any time soon. [redacted]

A senior Soviet Middle Eastern specialist stated on Soviet television on 30 July that there is "no end to the war yet in sight." [redacted]

Moscow, however, is likely to probe Iran's position to see if the costs of continued stalemate might move it to agree to negotiations and possibly to Soviet mediation. Although Iranian suspicions of the USSR make a Soviet role of honest broker unlikely, it would be the most damaging scenario from the US point of view. A role for the USSR in mediation—akin to that which it played between India and Pakistan at Tashkent in 1965—would be a substantial boost to its objective of becoming a major player in the Middle East, not to mention to its standing with both Iran and Iraq. [redacted]

Moscow will try to ensure that pro-Soviet Third World states rather than US friends, such as Turkey and Pakistan, play central roles in any mediation. Early in the war, for example, the Soviets backed a mediation effort of the Nonaligned Movement led by Cuba. [redacted]

The war's end almost certainly also would be accompanied by intensified Soviet efforts to improve bilateral ties with both Iran and Iraq, probably through arms sales, economic deals, and increased political contacts. Moscow, in addition, is likely to work through both diplomatic means and active measures to try to sustain Iran's hostility toward the United States and to forestall a significant upturn in US-Iraqi relations [redacted]

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Appendix

Chronology of Soviet Policy Toward Iran and Iraq, 1980-83

Date	Major Events	Iran	Iraq
1980			
22 September	Iraq invades Iran.		Deputy Premier Aziz visits Moscow.
Late September		Soviets embargo arms deliveries.	Soviets embargo arms deliveries.
October	Soviets and Syrians sign Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation.		
December		Afghan refugees in Iran, demonstrating on first anniversary of Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, inflict minor damage on Soviet Embassy in Tehran.	
1981			
Spring		Soviets lift arms embargo.	Soviets lift arms embargo.
June		Iranians and Soviets agree on some minor arms deals.	First Deputy Premier Ramadan visits Moscow.
June through September		Iranian Prime Minister Bani-Sadr flees country; wave of Mujahedin assassinations of Iranian leaders; President Khamenei and Prime Minister Musavi assume power.	
September	First major Iranian victory at Abadan.		
October through November	Iranian victory at Bostan.	Soviet Ambassador Vinogradov seeks to cultivate new Iranian leaders.	
1982			
March	Iranian victory at Shush-Dezful.	Authoritative <i>Pravda</i> article lists Soviet grievances against Iran.	
April			Soviets and Iraqis sign first new arms deal—estimated at \$2 billion—since war began.
May	Battle of Khorramshahr begins.		Oleg Grinevskiy, Chief of Foreign Ministry's Near East Department, visits Baghdad. He is the highest level Soviet official to call since the war began.
June	Iranians win battle of Khorramshahr; they push Iraqis out of all but small pockets of Iranian territory.	Soviets begin publicly criticizing Iran's stance on the war.	Soviets begin publicly praising Iraq's stated willingness to end the war.
June through August	War in Lebanon.		Aziz visits Moscow.
July	Iranians cross Iraqi border for first time in major battle of the war at Basra.	Landmark article in the CPSU journal <i>Kommunist</i> criticizes the Khomeini regime.	Soviets support Iraqi-inspired UN Security Council resolution calling for immediate cease-fire and withdrawal to prewar boundaries.

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Chronology of Soviet Policy Toward Iran and Iraq, 1980-83 (continued)

Date	Major Events	Iran	Iraq
August	Iraqi defenses at Basra hold and Iranian offensive fails.		
September	Front stabilizes.		
October			Soviets support another Iraqi-inspired cease-fire resolution in the UN Security Council.
November	Brezhnev dies and Andropov becomes CPSU leader.	Soviets and Iranians sign \$11 million arms deal.	
December		Demonstrators in Tehran burn the Soviet Embassy flag on the anniversary of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan; Moscow lodges official protest.	Ramadan, Aziz, and Army Chief of Staff Shanshal visit Moscow and negotiate a major arms deal.
1983			
January		Soviets protest Iranians' expulsion of a TASS correspondent.	
February	Iranians' first Doveyrich River offensive fails with heavy casualties.		Shanshal makes followup visit to Moscow.
		Iranians close down a Soviet-run hospital in Tehran.	
March			
April	Second Doveyrich River offensive stalls after early gains.		Aziz travels to Moscow to work out payment for Iraqi arms purchases.
May	No major battles. Iranians adopt "war of attrition" strategy of constant, but limited, probes at various points along the front. Iraq steps up its air attacks on Iranian cities, shipping and oil facilities.	<p>Tudeh leaders make "confessions" on Iranian television of spying for Soviets.</p> <p>Tudeh is dissolved.</p> <p>Iran expels 18 Soviet diplomats for ties with Tudeh and interference in Iranian internal affairs.</p> <p>The USSR expels three Iranian diplomats in retaliation.</p> <p>Gromyko meets with the new Iranian Ambassador to the USSR.</p>	

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Chronology of Soviet Policy Toward Iran and Iraq, 1980-83 (continued)

Date	Major Events	Iran	Iraq
June		Gromyko, addressing session of Supreme Soviet, criticizes Iran's expulsion of Soviet diplomats and warns that the USSR's policy toward Iran will be based upon Tehran's actions.	Saddam Husayn condemns Iraqi Communist Party in interview with Italian journalists. Gromyko, addressing session of Supreme Soviet, says USSR and Iraq are "linked by relations of friendship."
July	Iran launches attack in the Kurdistan area in the northern sector of the border.		Saddam lauds the Soviet-Iraqi "rapprochement" in interview with French journalist. Aziz makes another trip to Moscow (fifth since war began).
August		Iran protests to Moscow and Kabul over alleged bombing by Soviet or Afghan jets of Iranian village near the Afghan border.	Soviets and Iraqis snipe at each other in their media.

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*Iraqi Votes on UN Resolution Demanding USSR
Withdraw From Afghanistan*

JAN 80 YES

NOV 80 ABSENT

81 YES

82 YES

83 ABSTAINED

84 ABSTAINED

85 ABSTAINED

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